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Reference Materials-Stalking the Wild Electron: Librarians and Publishers Speak Out!

Frances C. Wilkinson

University of New Mexico General Library, fwilkins@unm.edu

Linda K. Lewis

University of New Mexico General Library, llewis@unm.edu

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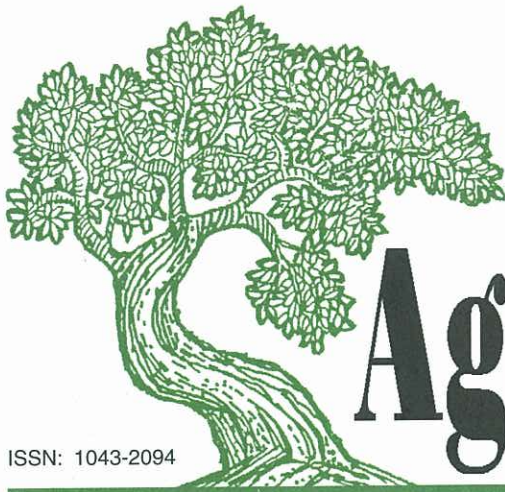
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Against the Grain

"Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians"

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Reference Materials — Stalking The Wild Electron: Librarians and Publishers Speak Out!

by **Frances C. Wilkinson** (Interim Associate Dean of Library Services, General Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-1466; phone 505-277-4241, fax 505-277-7288), <fwilkins@unm.edu> and **Linda K. Lewis** (Director of the Collection Management Department, General Library, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, 87131-1466; phone 505-277-7828, fax 505-277-4446), <llewis@unm.edu>

The past several interview-style columns for the reference issue of *Against the Grain* have dealt with such issues as the proliferation of reference materials, the increasing array of format choices, the impact of the Web on reference publishing, and the growth of products that combine traditional indexing and new full-text features. It has been said that libraries now exist in an ambidextrous universe — equally print and electronic. Is the world of reference publishing metamorphosing into a universe where electronic products



are quickly eclipsing print? Will we ever catch the wild electron or are we merely stalking it?



Electronic reference resources are becoming an increasingly greater part of reference publishing and reference collections. What proportion of the library reference collection is now in electronic format? What proportion of reference titles are published in electronic format? As publishers drop print editions of their works in favor of elec-

tronic ones, how are librarians responding to this change? To what extent are publishers abandoning print versions of reference resources? Some publishers are marketing electronic resources containing core existing resources along with expanded or updated materials and links. What impact is this having on reference collection development and reference publishing? How important are usage statistics for electronic resources to librarians and publishers? What types of statistics do librarians need? What types of statistics can publishers provide? To address these issues, the authors conducted an interview-

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If Rumors Were Horses

So much has happened over the summer, it's hard to know where to begin!

WOW! **Lee Ketcham Van Orsdel** was appointed **Dean of Libraries at Eastern Kentucky University** on July 1, 2000. She came to Eastern as Director of Libraries on August 1, 1999 after having been Director of Libraries at the University of Montevallo (Alabama) from 1991 through July 1999. Before that, she was Director of Account Services, Southeastern Region, for EBSCO Information Services. We all remember the fantastically upbeat Lee from many, many **Charleston Conferences**. Let's send her our congratulations at <libvanor@acs.eku.edu>.

Another wow! **Barbara Winters**—the fabulous—is the **Dean of Libraries at Marshall**

University (Huntington, WV) as of August 1, 2000. Unfortunately, Barbara will not be doing Group Therapy in Charleston in 2000, but she will be back in 2001! Congratulations to you, Barbara! <<http://webpages.marshall.edu/~brooks/>>.

Sandra K. Paul <Sandy@skpassociates.com> <http://www.bisg.org> - home page <Sandy@bookinfo.org> is the new **Executive Director of the Book Industry Study Group**—

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style joint discussion among several librarians and publishers. The participants, whether having similar or disparate views, all provide valuable insights. They include individuals from Brigham Young University, State University of New York at Buffalo, Texas A&M University, University of North Texas Libraries, ABC-CLIO, CQ Press, Greenwood Publishing Group/Greenwood Electronic Media, and John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Question #1. Electronic reference resources are becoming an ever greater part of reference publishing and reference collections. If you are a librarian: What proportion of your reference collection is now in electronic formats? What do you anticipate the proportion will be in five years? If you are a publisher: What proportion of your reference titles are published in electronic formats? What do you anticipate the proportion will be in five years?

THE LIBRARIANS:

Answer from Stephen E. Atkins, Associate University Librarian for Collection Management, Texas A&M University Libraries, College Station, TX:

"At Texas A&M University Libraries we do not break down our electronic resources into reference or non-reference categories. So many of our electronic resources are interdisciplinary that our administrative breakdown into subject clusters makes it impossible to divide them. In this year's budget we will be spending nearly \$1.5 million on electronic resources, up from \$80,000 only six years before. Our ranking among ARL libraries last year was 4th [for electronic resources] and we expect to match that this year. Our [print] reference collection is heavily used, but an increasing number of our patrons are utilizing electronic resources. I have no accurate overall use statistics, but I expect that nearly half our reference usage is electronic. I expect that this usage rate will increase in the next five years. If in doubt, we buy electronic resources over paper resources."

Answer from Susan L. Fales, Assistant University Librarian for Collection Development, Lee Library, Brigham Young University:

"This reference collection pie can be sliced in several ways: by format, i.e., periodical or monographic; by type of information, i.e., statistical, encyclopedic, handbooks, etc.; whether the reference source provides current or retrospective information. Looking at the question in this way, periodical types of reference sources, especially periodical indexes, have almost universally been converted to electronic format and that is how we buy them at this point. I cannot think of one major periodical index that is not available in electronic format, and if it is still available in print, we have chosen to cancel that print subscription.

Easy to say now, but in the early stages of this transition the decision was made with considerable angst. Reference materials such as encyclopedias, statistical sources and handbooks are probably 50-75% converted now to digital. As to the future, undoubtedly these types of resources will be converted and made available to reach almost 100%.

"I believe though that the question actually does not address the fundamental issue regarding reference and reference collections. What is a reference collection? And what constitutes reference resources? Periodical indexes converted from print to electronic represent only a piece of the issue we are facing at this time. With the advent of societies providing their journals in full-text coupled with an excellent search engine to these journals, for example the American Chemical Society electronic journal package, the question becomes where is the need for mediation in the reference process and with a traditional reference collection. Information seekers have the opportunity to go directly to many of these resources, without a traditional reference collection existing at all."

Answer from Cindy Hepfer, Head, Collection Management Services, Editor, Serials Review; Co-Editor, Advances in Serials Management, Health Sciences Library, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY:

"I would not like to hazard a guess as to the actual percentage of reference tools at the University at Buffalo (UB) Health Sciences Library (HSL) which are available in electronic format — unfortunately, we cannot easily get a report of this data from our current online system. However, the UB Libraries have skimmed funds off the top of the acquisitions budget for the past several years (\$250,000 for 1999/2000) to invest in an array of electronic resources, including A&I services, reference materials (such as dictionaries and directories), and full text databases. A list of the resources currently subscribed to at UB can be found at <http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/e-resources/alpha.html>. Several of the most important A&I services for HSL's clientele are on this list: Medline, Current Contents, Science Citation Index, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), and Biological Abstracts among them.

"In addition to the online resources subscribed to at the University Libraries level, for the past two to three years, HSL's reference librarians have been actively identifying Web-based resources for the technical services staff to catalog and link to from BISON, our online catalog. Since a number of important government publications that HSL has traditionally kept on reference are now available for free on the Web, we have dropped the print format of many of these titles (whether paid or gratis) and now rely instead on hotlinks from the catalog. However, when the reference staff believes that it is impor-

tant to ensure perpetual access to a resource, we keep standing orders for the print versions and add a link from BISON as an additional convenience.

"Due to patron demand, I firmly believe that HSL, along with the University Libraries, will spend a steadily increasing percentage of our budget on Internet resources. We have only recently made a case to the University administration for additional funding to purchase or license important online research resources to support faculty needs. At HSL we have strictly avoided CD-ROM-based reference resources for at least the past three years—we definitely favor broad-based Web access."

Answer from Martha Tarlton, Head, Humanities & Social Sciences, University of North Texas Libraries:

"We have a substantial number of electronic resources available through our electronic resource menu. (I can't readily give you a count on the number of databases vs. the number of print reference books.) I anticipate that the greatest growth in the area of electronic resources within the next five years will be in electronic journals. We currently respond to a majority of reference questions using our electronic resources or Web sites, though we also utilize print resources when appropriate."

THE PUBLISHERS:

Answer from Susan Spilka, Director of Corporate Communications, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York, NY:

"About five of our multi-volume reference titles are currently published in electronic (online or CD) format. We are, however, accelerating our move to online publication of more of these works, and we expect approximately five to ten more to go online within a year. It is important to note that the updating of all of these reference works will be done online.

"We are preparing all of our STM major reference works that are entering production now to be able to be delivered online, and we expect that, within a couple of years, all of our new reference works will be available online. Because of difficult legacy data issues, however, we will only selectively mount existing works online."

Answer from Kathryn Suarez, Director, Library Reference Publishing, CQ Press:

"Electronic references comprise just a small portion, say 5%, of our current offerings. We expect this percentage to increase dramatically in the next few years to about half. This fall we are launching CQ's Electronic Encyclopedia of American Government."

Answer from Scott A. Wich, Manager, Electronic Products, Greenwood Publishing Group/Greenwood Electronic Media, Westport, CT:

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<http://www.against-the-grain.com>

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"As of fall 2000, we will offer eight (of literally thousands) of our titles and series in electronic format: Critical Companions to Popular Contemporary Writers (released 2/2000), Women's Studies Encyclopedia (released 12/1999), Studies in Irish Literature (released 12/1999), Daily Life through History (released 12/1999), American Slavery: A Composite Autobiography (released 6/2000), Biographical Dictionary of American Sports: Baseball (released 6/2000), Encyclopedia of Pornography (due 9/2000), and Literature in Context (due 10/2000).

"In five years, our goal is to offer all of our major reference products in 'media-neutral' form: i.e., offered in print, electronic, or whatever format a librarian desires."

Answer from Euzetta Williams, Product Manager, Serials, ABC-CLIO:

"Currently approximately 25% of our titles are available in an electronic format; we are using netLibrary to provide this access. In the next five years we project that 100% of the titles will be available electronically. The schools division produces more electronic titles than print titles."

Question #2. The Encyclopedia Britannica is no longer available in print, and other publishers of reference materials are rumored to be considering dropping future print editions of their works. If you are a librarian: How are you coping with/ responding to this change in reference publishing? If you are a publisher: To what extent are you abandoning print versions of reference resources?

THE LIBRARIANS:

Answer from Stephen E. Atkins:

"My response is much the same for this question. Our student population is 43,000 and demand for materials continues to be heavy. We prefer to buy electronic resources because access can be obtained to a broader segment of our student population. Our budget depends heavily on a student fee and this guides our attitude towards making it as easy as possible for our patrons. We are abandoning print versions of reference resources as fast as possible. Some publishers are making it difficult for us by making us purchase both versions, but we are trying to renegotiate ourselves out of this quandary."

Answer from Susan L. Fales:

"I noted above that in the question of periodical indexes, we have long ago let go of our print versions. Is this process different than that? What we had to come to grips with regarding periodical indexes was the issue of archiving and providing access to information for future generations. This is essentially the same question. Do we need to make available in our library every version of an encyclopedia? Do even university libraries need

to keep every edition of monographic reference works? Are there enough differences between the editions and do our customers really need them? Who in this changing world takes the responsibility for archiving the digital publications? Libraries in the past have in reality taken this responsibility not the publisher. Now most libraries are turning to publishers to take on more of that role.

"There is a good reason for this change in attitude. Libraries are also now being asked to pay annual access fees, and I might add substantial annual access fees, to publications that they paid for once every few years, such as encyclopedias or dictionaries. The prime example that comes to mind is the OED [Oxford English Dictionary]. Although their pricing is beginning to go down because of the number of institutions and FTE's committed to buying access, our library would face over \$5,000 annually for a product that we bought every 20 years perhaps. Multiply that by a number of resources and the budgetary bottom line for any library becomes problematic. It means that libraries can provide less information, but the information they do provide goes to a wider audience. I'm not sure how a library can continue to select for the future, because of the ever increasing annual budgetary costs to what once were one-time or sporadic costs."

Answer from Cindy Hepfer:

"The print versions of a couple of our reference tools that are now available on the Web have been discontinued—and we have gladly accepted online access in these cases. In addition, there have been a few cases where we actually ordered the printed version of a monograph for reference only to discover that the publication was available for free on the Web. When this occurred, we canceled the order for the print version in favor of the online access. We sincerely appreciate the convenience of online access to reference materials so that our patrons (including distance learners) can readily access these tools from laboratories, classrooms, offices, or homes — assuming, of course, that costs and license terms (if any) are reasonable. And we would 'give our eye teeth' to have affordable online access to well-used loose-leaf publications that are particularly vulnerable to mutilation and a nuisance to maintain. I do worry, however, about whether future generations of researchers and students will be able to track the development of knowledge about a given topic over time if sequential editions are not somehow archived and made available. HSL serves a number of law firms that handle medical liability cases. If sequential editions of reference tools are not archived and readily accessible either here or at another institution, lawyers will certainly have a harder time defending or prosecuting health-related cases. There are times when seemingly out-of-date publications are critical to proving what was known about a drug, a procedure, etc. at a given point in time."

Answer from Martha Tarlton:

"When we learned that the hard copy of the Encyclopaedia Britannica would no longer be published, we ordered a copy of the final edition. We have had access to the electronic edition for some time. Many of our patrons prefer the online edition, particularly since they can access it from home. Others prefer the hard copy. In certain instances, such as with the Statistical Abstract of the United States, the print edition is much easier for patrons to use."

THE PUBLISHERS:

Answer from Susan Spilka:

"We will be guided by the requirements of our customers: they will make the decision. We believe it is likely that, over time, libraries will ultimately prefer to purchase reference resources electronically only, with no print version. The value in the access at the desktop, across an entire institution, is indisputable. As users begin to use and appreciate online reference works, and as the functionality improves, especially cross-product searching, there will be less demand for the print volumes. This will, in turn, drive the move to 'online only' because the consequent decline in print runs will drive up the price for the print."

Answer from Kathryn Suarez:

"Our reference development plans will not be focused on what might be construed as straight 'substitutes' for print works. Rather our content experts are focused on taking full advantage of the electronic medium by combining various types of content and interactivity as you cannot in a book. For example, with our invaluable archive of current event coverage in the CQ Researcher and legislative record in the CQ Weekly we plan to give researchers the ability to examine a topic from every vantage point: from current and historical points of view, as well as factual and analytical perspectives, plus we expect to make these CQ classics fully interactive with our award-winning directory and bibliographic sources."

Answer from Scott A. Wich:

"In keeping with our long history as a leader in library reference publishing, we will continue to offer print editions even as we expand our list of electronic products. This goes back to our goal of media neutrality: as long as librarians continue to demand them, we will continue to produce the same high-quality print products that have been (and will continue to be) in their stacks for decades."

Answer from Euzetta Williams:

"At the present, we do not intend to abandon print editions of titles. In the future, who knows what will happen? This does appear to be the trend that other publishers are following."

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Question #3. *Currently some publishers are marketing electronic resources that have at their core existing print resources along with expanded or updated materials and links. These range from Gale Group's Resources Centers that include original reference materials and periodical articles to Oxford University Press' American National Biography that includes new entries and updated references. If you are a librarian: What impact will this type of publication have on reference collection development? If you are a publisher: What impact will this type of publication have on reference publishing?*

THE LIBRARIANS:

Answer from Stephen E. Atkins:

"At present, I am not sure what impact that this marketing ploy by those publishers marketing electronic resources will have. We want access to as much material or as many links as possible. I expect that we will be interested in anything that expands the scholarly potential of a resource. Our biggest problem is dealing with all the new databases and full-text products reaching the market. We can only digest a portion of the market each year. Our librarians recommend trials of various products, but we can only acquire a few of them a year. Inflation of 10 percent a year on electronic resources hits us hard with an electronic budget of \$1.5 million. Each year we have to come up with around \$150,000 just to retain what we have already selected."

Answer from Susan L. Fales:

"Perhaps I've already answered this question above when I referred to the changing nature of a reference collection. It certainly isn't the same as it was even ten years ago. From a collection development standpoint, the problem that develops is with the overlap of different formats for the same publication and the increasing expense of this overlap. Add to this the fact that publishers often expect, and in fact set their pricing based upon what a library owns of their print collection, and libraries are caught between a rock and a hard place. We want to supply what our customers need, but we're able to afford less and less of what they need."

"The other problem it creates for a reference librarian is never being quite sure what is actually in the reference source you are telling your customers about, whether you are trying to help someone at a reference desk or are teaching library usage in a classroom setting. The publisher's ability to change links and add additional material means that the resource is no longer discrete and knowable. It becomes a very slippery product."

Answer from Cindy Hepfer:

"My initial reaction to this model was that it might be useful for some categories of pub-

lications and that reference collection developers should encourage it. In my library online updates would be useful for drug reference guides: information about drugs that have been newly approved or have been found to have harmful side effects should be made widely available without delay. Why hold up spreading critical information while updates go through layout and proof stages, printing and mailing, and check-in and filing?

"However, as I gave the model further consideration, I began to wonder why - except for the archival/perpetual access problem - publications that benefit so much from online updates or supplementary material are not published entirely on the Web. Then the information would be completely up-to-date and readily accessible from anywhere in a registered IP address range, at any time of the day or night. I think that this is a model we should work toward, while continuing to work hard to solve the archiving problem."

"In addition, I believe that multi-media will have a decided impact on the functionality and value of Web-based health-related information, including reference materials. A medical dictionary, for instance, might include sound clips to illustrate an irregular heartbeat or a particular kind of cough. Video clips might help someone diagnose a patient with a particular disease or disorder. Web-based materials have only begun to tap their full potential."

THE PUBLISHERS:

Answer from Susan Spilka:

"The wonderful opportunity presented by Web publishing is that we can offer a greater range of information and data in our reference works. We can offer multimedia, data sets, software, expanded color, etc. We can provide links to other resources so that researchers and students can follow meaningful discussion threads. We can update the reference material more frequently and add new material more regularly. We can offer new sales and pricing models, which vary from the traditional subscription model and reflect the value-added and ongoing nature of online publishing."

Answer from Kathryn Suarez:

"Promises to be a challenging period for all reference publishers and a rewarding period for those who think creatively about matching the content to the medium. We are navigating our way through a host of questions in each of our content areas including what is the appropriate update cycle for each online product (so we balance editorial costs with currency) and how do we address our customers' need to ensure an archival collection? Our focus is on recreating the satisfaction our customers experience in using CQ books to find precisely what they need to know about government, politics and current affairs—with the understanding that readers increasingly wish to find it with clicks rather than the turn of a page."

Answer from Scott A. Wich:

"Quite simply, it will make reference publishing far better for the librarian, and especially for the end user. For example, at the core of our *American Slavery* product is a 40-volume set of WPA slave narratives compiled for the first time by George Rawick and Greenwood Press. By transforming this series into an electronic product, we took this essential resource, added value to it (with search capabilities, constantly updated links, a 'virtual classroom' with real-time discussion groups, and many other features) and delivered it to libraries, classrooms, and researchers at a far lower price (starting at more than 75% less for most libraries) than the print volumes. Libraries are going to get more for much less from the quality reference publishers."

Answer from Euzetta Williams:

"If this model proves financially successful (that's an unknown), it will change everything. Discrete reference books, whether traditional paper or e-book, on specialized subjects are likely to dwindle away. Reference will most likely take the form of constantly updated, searchable, customizable, Web-based databases on broad topics, developed and maintained in house and sold through subscriptions. Except (perhaps) for nonprofit publishers, reference will increasingly become a commodity, with (probably) less depth. And analysis and more breadth, currency, searchability, and technological sophistication."

Question #4. *Usage statistics for electronic resources are frequently discussed without much consensus. How important are they — really — to librarians and publishers? What types of statistics do librarians need? If you are a librarian: What type of statistics should publishers provide? If you are a publisher: What type of statistics can publishers provide?*

THE LIBRARIANS:

Answer from Stephen E. Atkins:

"Usage statistics for electronic resources are essential. We have to reexamine our electronic resources annually to justify resubscribing. This process takes nearly six months and our librarians have found it agonizing. Use statistics are one of the key measurements for retention or canceling. Some publishers are good about this, but others make little effort. Sometimes sloppy statistics rebound negatively towards certain electronic publishers."

"One example was a database that has various ways to enter its holdings. Once in, the user could shift between various parts of the database, but the use statistic only showed up on the first choice. I was entering the database on the international mode but doing most of my searching on other parts of the database. A committee of librarians kept the part of the database that most of us used to

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enter the resource and canceled the other parts of the database for lack of use. When I finally figured out the problem, the funds had been shifted to another database and it was too late to do anything about it at that time. This is only one example of a problem that use statistics can produce if they are not calculated correctly."

Answer from Susan L. Fales:

"Librarians need to understand what our customers are using. I think the JSTOR model is an excellent statistical capture tool because it breaks out all of the search and capture possibilities from browsing to viewing to printing. And then it further breaks out the aggregate title-by-title. When consortia licenses are negotiated, an important issue is how the publisher provides statistics. Most publishers provide consortia level usage, but many do not allow the library to capture their own institution's usage. In order to make sound selection decisions we must have this information. Libraries need to be able to rely on a standard way of accessing and looking at statistics publisher-to-publisher so that apples and oranges can truly be compared."

"A hit is a hit is a hit, I guess you could say. Once we gather this information libraries must use it. Libraries are using internally devised studies to show cost/use in print journals, and they are taking circulation statistics and coupling these with automated inventories of monograph titles in order to adjust monograph purchases. Until we actually use the information for our electronic collections, publishers have every right to question their need to supply libraries with this information. Libraries are just beginning to build into our cultures the notion of assessment and review. Usage must be an essential part of the decision making process as electronic products need to be sent through an annual review cycle, in the same way that print periodicals and their cost/use is reviewed, and monographic approval programs are continually adjusted to provide appropriate coverage within budgetary constraints."

Answer from Cindy Hepfer:

"Some institutions are able to fund their libraries at the levels necessary to provide faculty, staff, students, researchers, and others with most of the information and resources that they need. But such institutions are few and far between. The SUNY system, where I work, has been steadily losing ground for many years. Increases in library funding have never kept up—or generally even come close—to the rate of inflation of library materials. Since 85 percent of HSL's budget is spent on journals, the staff in my library has developed a system to track the number of times a journal issue/volume is reshelfed. This provides a reasonable, though certainly imperfect, measure of use. We rely heavily, but not exclusively, on this data when journal cancella-

tion time rolls around each summer/fall."

"If libraries are to invest limited resources wisely, we also need a solid measure of the use of all of our online resources. Number of times a title is accessed, like number of times an item is re-shelfed, is a very imperfect measure of use—but at this point, I would happily take it. The number of times particular articles, chapters, images, etc. are printed or downloaded would be more helpful, but even then we don't know whether what has been printed or downloaded has actually been read. Moreover, I'm not sure how we would cope with enormous amounts of detailed information. Perhaps some bright librarian-programmer will develop software to help the rest of us analyze article/chapter/image level use data!"

Answer from Martha Tarlton:

"Our LAN/PC Management maintains usage statistics on our electronic resources. These statistics are particularly helpful to evaluate whether to retain a particular subscription or whether to increase the number of simultaneous users. In addition to knowing the number of searches in a database, it is important to know the number of times users have not been able to access the database."

THE PUBLISHERS:

Answer from Susan Spilka:

"As part of our online journal publishing activity, we have been designing user statistics that meet the needs of our customers."

These include number of user sessions and accesses of abstracts and full text. We expect to provide the same types of user statistics for our reference materials."


Answer from Kathryn Suarez:

"We're still developing usage statistics. Customers and other publishers have underscored the importance of capturing meaningful usage statistics rather than standard hit rates that may be misleading. Is, for example, a high access rate assumed to indicate great satisfaction in the source, or simple accessibility? Rather than hit rates and usage time, perhaps librarians and publishers should devise meaningful ways to capture end-user feedback on what information was accessed plus what information actually addressed the user's question or research agenda."

Answer from Scott A. Wich:

"As technology improves, so too will the usage information that we will be able to provide to librarians. So far, we are not hearing much from librarians about statistics."

Answer from Euzetta Williams:

"For ABC-CLIO books, this is not applicable—yet. In the future, who knows? For our history serial titles, we provide statistics conforming to the ICOLC standards; the e-mail reports are mailed to Web subscribers automatically each month. The electronic products from the schools division will provide our customers with the necessary usage reports." 

Rumors

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full story at: <http://www.nytimes.com/library/tech/00/05/biztech/articles/03newspaper-links.ht> Pretty cool, right? Will wonders never cease? And all of you will see this for yourselves when you come to **Charleston in November** so bring your hand-held scanner with you!

Oh, yes, I almost forgot to tell you that the **Charleston Conference Website** is up and taking online registrations! Visit <http://www.cofc.edu/library/conference>.

And you meet the nicest people on airplanes. I met **Evelyn Fazio** efazio@mesharpe.com—see the interview with her, this issue, p.48—who has become a bosom buddy and just recently I met the charming duo of **Meredith** and **Don Beagle** drbeagle@att.net. Don used to be at **UNC-Charlotte** and before that he was at the **Charleston County Library**! There's that Charleston place again. Anyway, Don is now Director of Libraries at **Belmont Abbey** in Charlotte, NC. And, talk about coincidences, Don just wrote an article in the July *College & Research Libraries* called "Web-based Learning Environments: Do Libraries Matter." Watch for our upcoming interview with Don in a future issue of *ATG*.

The **Book Industry Study Group (BISG)** has announced the availability of an international standard for the exchange of bibliographic data by publishers, distributors, and booksellers. The standard, known as **ONIX (ONline Information eXchange)** International, was immediately endorsed by **Amazon.com**, **Barnes&Noble.com**, and other major U.S. e-tailers, retailers, wholesalers and bibliographic suppliers. The standard and its User Guide provide a scheme of XML tags for identifying all of the information about a book, from title, author, publisher, cover graphics, author biography, reviews, down to details such as dimensions and weight. A preliminary version of **ONIX**, developed by a working group of the **Association of American Publishers (AAP)**, was released last January. The new version represents a major advance in that it incorporates XML tagging and many refinements hammered out over the intervening months. The complete documentation is available free of charge for download from www.EDItEUR.org/ONIX.html. "We have already received test data in ONIX International from several publishers and can't wait until EVERYONE sends us data using these tags," said **Cindy Cunningham**, Manager of the US Catalog Team at **Amazon.com**. "In the future, we hope to be able to get all data—

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